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Articles in Today's Clips Tuesday, May 29, 2007

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WZZM13 ONLINE - ABC TELEVISION for ALL OF WEST MICHIGAN

Two years after his murder, Ricky Holland is laid to rest

Matthew Miller/Lansing State Journal

Created: 5/25/2007 8:40:30 PM
Updated: 5/25/2007 8:40:56 PM

Lansing - Ricky Holland was buried Friday in an above-ground vault at St. Joseph's Cemetery in Lansing.

The seven-year-old boy was murdered in 2005 by his adoptive mother, Lisa Holland. She and Tim Holland, Ricky's adoptive father, are both serving prison sentences related to the killing.

Dr. Dean Sienko, Ingham County chief medical examiner, will retain legal control of the skeletal remains until all appeals in the case are exhausted, a process that could take years.

But last month Probate Judge George Economy issued an order that the boy's body be buried after Ingham County authorities and the families of Tim and Lisa Holland came to an agreement.

"I hope this information helps our community come to closure on the tragic circumstances surrounding Ricky Holland's death," Sienko said in a statement issued this evening.

"I encourage area residents to remember Ricky in ways they find appropriate and may his life serve to sensitize us to the plight of abused children and strengthen our resolve to ensure all children grow in safe and caring homes."

Web Editor: [Chris Fleszar](#), Managing Editor



Ricky Holland

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Ricky Holland Buried

Reporter: Tony Tagliavia

Email Address: tony.tagliavia@wilx.com

The body of Ricky Holland was laid to rest in Lansing Friday, Ingham County Medical Examiner Dr. Dean Sienko said.

The 7-year-old murdered by his adoptive parents was buried in an above-ground vault at St. Joseph's Cemetary.

In a statement, Sienko said he hopes the boy's life will "serve to sensitize us to the plight of abused children and strengthen our resolve to ensure all children grow in safe and caring homes."



Find this article at:

<http://www.wilx.com/news/headlines/7694212.html>

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Couple plead no contest to abuse

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, May 27, 2007

By Paul Janczewski

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A Fenton Township couple face prison time when sentenced for their roles in a child abuse case that left the woman's 2 1/2-year-old daughter with nearly four dozen bruises and life-threatening injuries.

Christopher L. Rowand, 22, and Jessica A. Lake, 19, both pleaded no contest Friday before Genesee Circuit Judge Judith A. Fullerton to charges from the incident.

Both were originally charged with first-degree child abuse, a 15-year felony, in the Nov. 1-3 injuries to Gina Marie Courtney, Lake's daughter. Rowand was her live-in boyfriend.

Rowand pleaded to the original charge but will not be charged with being a habitual offender for previous car-theft-related convictions.

Lake pleaded to assault with intent to commit great bodily harm less than murder, a 10-year felony.

Both will be sentenced June 25 before Fullerton.

At an earlier hearing, Dr. Brian Nolan, chief of Hurley Medical Center's pediatric unit, said the girl was on a ventilator and in a deep coma in critical condition when he saw her Nov. 3.

He said she had a severe head injury and numerous injuries, both old and new, covering her body, including apparent cigarette burns on her chest.

He likened the head injury, which he estimated occurred about 12 hours earlier, to those he's seen on car-crash victims who were not restrained by seatbelts.

Other witnesses said the child was originally taken to Genesys Regional Medical Center, and a social worker there tried to talk to Lake and Rowand about the injuries.

They said the child had fallen from a lower bunk and knocked over an ashtray, but they left the hospital while officials there prepared to move the child to Hurley.

They were stopped by police a short distance from Genesys.

Lake later told a Genesee County Sheriff's Department sergeant the child was not injured in that manner, but denied inflicting any bruises herself.

Rowand's mother also testified, saying her son admitted causing the burns on the child's chest.

Assistant Genesee County Prosecutor Jennifer McKellar said the child is living with relatives and recovering from her injuries.



Mom who let daughter have sex gets probation

Prosecution couldn't prove pregnancy equates to injury

By Jameson Cook
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A Utica woman who allowed her 14-year-old daughter to have sex with two men and become pregnant with one of them will spend two years on probation and pay a \$500 fine.

Tammy Fennell, 35, who called herself "Tammy Tokes" and bragged about her partying lifestyle on a MySpace page, had been charged with felony child abuse, but she took advantage of an offer from the prosecution to plead guilty to misdemeanor child abuse. She was sentenced Thursday by Judge Douglas Shepherd of 41A District Court in Shelby Township.

The daughter, who is now in foster care, was twice impregnated by one of the men and had two miscarriages. She is pregnant again, officials said.

Assistant Macomb prosecutor Molly Zappitell said the original charge of second-degree child abuse, which carried a maximum penalty of four years in prison, would have to include "serious physical injury," and the prosecution may not be able to prove pregnancy meets that standard.

The crime that Fennell pleaded guilty to -- fourth-degree child abuse -- involves negligence, Zappitell said.

Zappitell said bringing the felony charge against Fennell was important to send a message to parents that they can be held responsible for contributing to crimes committed against their children. Fennell allowed one of the men, Christopher M. Garcia, to move into their apartment and have frequent sex with her daughter, police said.

Garcia and James E. Przeadzki, both 21, were charged with third-degree criminal sexual conduct, which carries a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison. Garcia got the girl pregnant, and Przeadzki admitted to having sexual relations with another 14-year-old girl at the apartment.

Przeadzki recently pleaded guilty to an added lesser charge -- assault with intent to commit sexual penetration -- and is scheduled to be sentenced June 14 by Judge Donald Miller of Macomb County Circuit Court.

Garcia, who has prior convictions for home invasion and a sex offense, has been offered a less-attractive plea deal -- pleading guilty to two counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct and one count of failing to register as a sex offender -- in exchange for a habitual offender status removed. A habitual offender classification can increase a penalty by 50 percent or more.

Garcia appeared in court this week but "wants to think it over," said defense attorney Thomas Reynolds. Garcia is scheduled to appear again June 5 before Circuit Judge Matthew Switalski.

The girl also garnered media attention in 2004 when she fled to Indiana to have sex with a man she met on MySpace. She told the man she was 18. They were found by police, and the man was not charged.



Utica mom who allowed two men to abuse her 14-year-old daughter gets probation

May 25, 2007

By STEVE NEAVLING

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A Utica mother who allowed two men to have sex with her 14-year-old daughter won't spend time behind bars.

Tammy Fennell, 35, was sentenced to two years' probation and a \$500 fine Thursday after pleading guilty to fourth-degree child abuse in 41-A District Court in Shelby Township.

Judge Douglas Shepherd said Fennell would be allowed to have supervised visits with her daughter, who is in foster care.

The daughter -- who has miscarried twice -- miscarried a pregnancy with one of the men and is pregnant again by the other man, both of whom were 21 years old at the time. They have been charged with sex offenses.

Prosecutors said Fennell knew about the relationships and did nothing to stop them.

The daughter grabbed national headlines last year when she met a 25-year-old Indiana man by posing as an 18-year-old on the social networking Web site MySpace.com. Police found the pair in Jackson on their way to Indiana after an Amber Alert was issued.

The man was not charged because police said he didn't know she was underage.

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Detroit Free Press

Local news in brief

May 26, 2007

UTICA: Mom gets probation in daughter-sex case

A Utica mother who allowed two men to have sex with her 14-year-old daughter won't spend time behind bars.

The mother, 35, was sentenced to two years' probation and a \$500 fine Thursday after pleading guilty to fourth-degree child abuse in 41-A District Court in Shelby Township.

Judge Douglas Shepherd said the mother would be allowed to have supervised visits with her daughter, who is in foster care. The Free Press is not naming the mother to protect the identity of the daughter.

The daughter miscarried a pregnancy with one of the men and is pregnant again with the other man, both of whom were 21 years old at the time. The men have been charged with sex offenses.

Prosecutors said the mother knew about the relationships and did nothing to stop them.

Compiled by Kristen Jordan Shamus, Korie Wilkins, Cecil Angel and Steve Neavling.

Adrian Daily Telegram

LOCAL NEWS BRIEFS

Saturday, May 26, 2007 7:33 PM EDT

Plea ends trial

From staff reports

ADRIAN — A 33-year-old Blissfield man pleaded no contest to reduced charges in a child sex abuse case Thursday in Lenawee County Circuit Court, avoiding a jury trial that was to begin that morning.

Kevin Brian Gritmaker was found guilty of fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct and felonious assault after Judge Timothy P. Pickard reviewed reports by a Lenawee County sheriff's deputy who investigated the complaint last year. Pickard said a report of an interview with the 9-year-old victim indicated Gritmaker reached into her pants on June 21 last year in Blissfield.

The original first-degree criminal sexual conduct charge that carries a maximum life prison term is to be dismissed at sentencing on July 11. Assistant Lenawee County prosecutor Laura Schaedler said the plea agreement also allows Gritmaker to request that the fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct conviction be set aside if he successfully completes five years of probation. Gritmaker must register as a sex offender until that time.

Plea taken in sex case

ADRIAN — A Tecumseh man avoided a jury trial next week on child sex abuse and pornography charges by pleading guilty to a reduced attempted third-degree criminal sexual conduct count Wednesday in Lenawee County Circuit Court. The plea to a charge carrying a maximum five-year prison term was entered by Rolland Calzada, 46. He was accused of having sex with a girl younger than 16 in Tecumseh over a period from 1999 through November last year. He was also facing pornography charges involving the girl.

In pleading guilty to attempted third-degree criminal sexual conduct, Calzada tried to deflect blame from himself.

“She attempted to have oral sex with me,” Calzada said.

“And you attempted to have her do that, too, didn’t you?” responded Judge Timothy P. Pickard.

“Yes,” Calzada answered.

Sentencing is scheduled for July 13. The plea agreement includes a sentence within state guidelines for the case that defense attorney John Baker of Adrian said he believes will call for no more than a county jail term and probation.

May 28, 2007

Parents struggle to protect kids online

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

When Patti Williard peered over her 14-year-old son's shoulder as he chatted online with a friend, she soon found out she was a "pos" (parent over shoulder) who was "sitt" (still in the dark).

It was an encrypted message, said Williard of Grosse Pointe Farms. "I thought: I got two other boys; I'd better figure out that encryption. There are too many crazy people out there."

Concerned parents such as Williard are getting conflicting information from experts on how best to keep their children safe from the Internet predators they fear. While many law enforcement officials suggest that kids not be left alone with their computers, more voices are calling for parents to learn more and teach more about the dangers of social networking online.

Detroit U.S. Attorney Stephen Murphy has told parents they should keep computers out of young people's rooms and ban them from posting information on social networking sites such as Myspace.com or Facebook.com to avoid meeting dangerous people.

"I don't think people have any idea how bad it is out there," said Murphy, whose office is prosecuting more than 100 cybercriminals, up from 65 cases last year. "Keeping your kids well-supervised on the Internet is the best way to keep them from harm."

Safety techniques debated

Local parenting expert James Windell is an advocate of parents becoming computer savvy, tracking kids' Web site visits and installing filtering software. But he says forbidding children from social network sites goes too far.

"You ban kids from doing things, it makes the attraction greater," said Windell, a psychologist in Royal Oak who has written many books on parenting. "Then they are going to do what you don't want them to do."

Other experts say that the growing paranoia among parents is the bigger problem: As more parents deny their children Internet access, they also deny their kids a basic tool for life. These experts say the best way to protect children is to understand how young people use the Internet and help them translate common sense into cybersense.

"Parents need to not panic," said Parry Aftab, executive director of the child protection Web site WiredSafety.org. "They need to take a breath, and they need to care. You need to stay involved."

Parents' desires to protect their children online range from wanting to spy on everything their kids do online to trusting them too much, said Aftab, who has met thousands of parents around the country while conducting workshops on Internet safety. Approaching the issue from a balanced perspective is the best way for parents to help their kids protect themselves against the millions of anonymous users on the Internet, she said.

"Understand the risks are real but so are the benefits," Aftab said. "Our kids have to use the technology. They need it for school, they need it for their careers, they need it for life."

Cyberpredators are finding fertile ground as more households acquire computers and young people further develop a language to communicate online. Most predators know the language children use when chatting online, said Macomb County Sheriff Mark Hackel.

Police step up efforts

"It's a way of relating to them: 'I know your language so I must be your age. I am OK to talk to because I understand,'" Hackel said.

FBI investigations into child pornography and exploitations have exploded, accorded to the agency's Innocent Images National Initiatives. Between 1996 and 2006, cases opened grew 1,789 percent, from 113 in 1996 to 2,135, according to FBI data.

Locally, police and federal officials are increasing their efforts to stop cybercriminals. In the past month, authorities charged three men, including Detroit Roosevelt Reeves II, who was arraigned on charges of trying to set up a sexual encounter with a state agent posing as a 14-year-old girl on Myspace.com. Richard Carrasco from Texas was charged with sexual assault after police said he was found in a Waterford Township hotel room with a semiautomatic pistol and a 14-year-old Commerce Township girl he met online.

Internet safety was ranked among the top 10 health concerns of parents in the National Poll on Children's Health, released this month by Mott Children's Hospital at the University of Michigan. The issue is a relatively new concern among other problems parents worry about such as smoking, drinking and drug abuse.

"This generation is more connected than any generation before, and parents are concerned about the ways their kids can be injured, intimidated or mistreated over the Internet," said Matthew Davis, director of the poll.

"Parents are seeing this as a health issue right along with car accidents and obesity."

Grosse Pointe Park resident Helen Landuyt is trying to figure out how to best keep her 13-year-old daughter and 8-year-old son safe online. Since she didn't grow up in the electronic era, she recently attended a meeting in Grosse Pointe that gave parents some tools to help them help their children stay safe.

"I think the important thing is having an open dialogue, looking at what they are doing and why they're doing it," Landuyt said. "I can't cover their eyes from everything, but I can help them see. It's a fine line between how you protect your kids or how you prepare them."

You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or kkozlowski@detnews.com.

Encouraging safety

www.record-eagle.com

05/27/2007

At Issue: Aging Out of Foster Care**Foster children slipping through the cracks**

By SHAWN SEMELSBERGER

Each year, more than 650 Michigan youth "age out" of foster care, leaving the system with no permanent family or place to call home. When I aged out, I was in the middle of my senior year of high school. I had no safe place to live, no job, no family and no security.

Because I entered foster care through the treatment avenue for youth with mental health-related issues, I could not access an Independent Living Plan that would have allowed a caseworker to help me secure safe, affordable housing, job counseling and general transitional services. Instead, I fell through the cracks.

It was the middle of winter, and I had no place to go. Since I couldn't afford to buy food, I ate free lunch at school and skipped dinner.

When I graduated from high school, I could not afford to buy a cap and gown, so I didn't walk with my class. I never purchased a yearbook because I couldn't afford it. Worse yet, I had nobody to teach me how to grocery shop, cook or balance a checkbook. At 21, I am still learning how.

The good news is that I am OK now. Thanks to the support of a lot of people, I am in college, I have a house and I am engaged to a wonderful partner with whom I have been in a healthy relationship for three years.

Hundreds of young people who enter foster care are not so fortunate. They are refused vital transitional services in Michigan, and too many become pregnant, incarcerated, homeless or worse after leaving the system.

Young people — like me — who age out of foster care are quickly confronted with the harsh realities of life on our own. The decisions we face everyday — how to pay the bills, pay for college, determine where we will live and where we can go on Christmas or other holidays — are difficult, and must be answered without the guidance or support of a loving family.

As a rising sophomore in college, I have defied these odds. But that does not mean that I do not wish for a family of my own. We need to take steps to ensure that all children in foster care can leave the system to live with permanent families.

When I was 18 and had just aged out, I was completely alone. Happily, I can now say that I do have a family. My fiancé's family treats me as their own kin, and I have expanded my circle of support to include members of my community and other foster youth I have met during my travels as an advocate.

The need to reform federal foster care financing is urgent, so there can be more happy endings like mine. Every day we fail to act, 67 children like me leave foster care without a permanent family. And that is 67 too many.

About the author

Shawn Semelsberger, of Traverse City, aged out of foster care and is now an advocate for foster care programs. She is on the board of directors at Third Level Crisis Center.

About the forum

The forum is a periodic column of opinion written by Record-Eagle readers in their areas of interest or expertise. Submissions of 500 words or less may be made by e-mailing letters@record-eagle.com. Please include biographical information and a photo.

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05/27/2007

At Issue: Aging Out of Foster Care

Foster youth need permanent families

By GARY STANGLER

Today, there are more than 513,000 children in foster care. They remain in foster care for an average of nearly three years, moving at least three times. Many are not simply removed from their parents, but separated from brothers and sisters.

Most children leave foster care to rejoin their families, be adopted or find permanence with a grandparent or other relative. But according to a new report, 24,000 young people "aged out" of foster care without a permanent family in 2005 — a record high.

Titled "Time for Reform: Aging Out and On Their Own," the report was co-authored by the national Kids Are Waiting campaign and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. The report finds that, while the number of children in foster care decreased between 1998 and 2004, the number aging out of care jumped 41 percent. The report also found that youth who age out have spent twice as long in foster care as children who join permanent families — five years compared to 2.5 years.

Young people who "age out" without a family they can count on face incredible challenges. Many youth who age out of foster care struggle with physical or mental illness, are chronically unemployed or become incarcerated. More than one in five experience homelessness. Only half graduate from high school; just 3 percent finish college.

Simply put, the report finds that we are not doing all that we can for the young people who age out of foster care.

Every child deserves a family, and that need does not dissipate at age 18. In the report, young people spoke of the desire for a family, the need for a permanent connection, the wish for someplace to go on holidays, someone to walk them down the aisle and someone for their grandchildren to call "granddad."

We must do more to ensure that all children in foster care leave the system to live permanently with loving families. Congress can help states better meet the needs of the children and families by changing the existing federal financing structure to increase its flexibility and reliability. This would help states address the issues that face children and families — whether that means offering family counseling or job training to keep families together or recruiting foster and adoptive families to help children leave foster care quickly.

Twenty-four thousand teenagers left our care last year to enter adulthood largely on their own. How much longer will we wait to reform the system?

About the author

Gary Stangler is executive director of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and a member of the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care.

About the forum

The forum is a periodic column of opinion written by Record-Eagle readers in their areas of interest or expertise. Submissions of 500 words or less may be made by e-mailing letters@record-eagle.com. Please include biographical information and a photo.



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Speaking up for kids Volunteers advocate for children in court

Monday, May 28, 2007

By Emily Monacelli

Special to the Gazette

Children in the foster care system may be scared, upset or lonely and have little or no choice in what happens to them.

That's where Court Appointed Special Advocates for children, or CASAs, come in.

"They become the voice of the children in court," said Jaime McCrank, volunteer services coordinator for CASA Kalamazoo. "The whole point of their advocacy is to tell the judge what they believe is in the children's best interest."

The CASA volunteer is a member of the community who is appointed by a family court judge and trained to advocate for the best interests of children who must come before the court. A CASA can be assigned if child protective services officials decide that a case will go to court, especially, McCrank said, when one or both parents are not cooperating with prevention services; if there was a drug raid; or if there was a sexual assault in the case.

The organization started nationally in 1976. Kalamazoo's CASA program, which began in 1980, was the first in Michigan. In 2005, 474 children were in foster care in Kalamazoo County, according to McCrank. The goal of CASA Kalamazoo is to have each child or group of siblings represented in court.

Right now, CASA Kalamazoo has 28 volunteers, a low number, and if the numbers do not come up, the program is in danger of shutting down, McCrank said. The majority of volunteers work full time, and are a mix of community members including those with and without college degrees, according to McCrank.

According to McCrank, CASA has three goals: to provide a voice for children in court processes; protect children's best interests; and get them settled into safe, permanent homes as quickly as possible.

CASA volunteers must meet a variety of requirements. They must be at least 21 years old, must commit 18 months to being a volunteer -- the average time it takes a case to go through the court system -- must have their own insured transportation, and must complete a 35-hour training program and attend monthly training sessions.

They must also agree to a criminal background screening, along with screenings by the Sexual Offender Registry, Secretary of State and Central Registry with Children's Protective Services.

Each CASA is assigned to one child or group of siblings at a time. The volunteer must become familiar with the children, family and situation, and may receive some hostility from parents, McCrank said.

In situations in which children may work with different attorneys and multiple caseworkers throughout court proceedings, the CASA volunteer stays the whole time.

Curtis Bell, probate judge assigned to Ninth Circuit Court family division since February 2005, has presided at many court hearings where a CASA volunteer is involved. Ideally, a CASA volunteer would be assigned to each case, but the numbers are not there, he said.

CASA volunteers give a fresh look at the situation, according to Bell. "They give a real good neutral perspective," he said. "Their loyalties are entirely tied to their task, which is to do what is best for the child."

CASA volunteer Susan Fyan said as an "information gatherer for the court," she concentrates on building relationships with the children with whom she works, telling them that she is someone they can trust and that she is someone who will stay around. In the meantime, she makes a point to talk to the adults in those children's lives, including grandparents and other family members, teachers and therapists. For instance, finding out if a child is going to school hungry or in dirty clothes is a good indicator of other aspects of his or her life.

In a "stream of faces," Fyan said she is a consistent person on whom the children can trust. "I'm the face that's going to be there through the whole thing," she said. "That's the commitment we make."

At the same time, Fyan said she must remind herself not to get too emotionally involved, that she will only be a good reporter to the court if she stays objective.

"At the end of that experience together, you have to say goodbye, too," she said. "You get them in a good place, hopefully, and there's no checking back in and seeing how the story turned out."

To get involved

If you would like to become a CASA volunteer, or for more information, contact Jamie McCrank, CASA Kalamazoo volunteer services coordinator, at (269) 385-6078.

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Attorney general asked to stop Riverview's closing

May 25, 2007

By PATRICIA ANSTETT

FREE PRESS MEDICAL WRITER

A Michigan labor union and two Detroit women Friday asked Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox to immediately stop the closing of Detroit Riverview, saying it would create a "tidal wave" of problems for the poor and cause financial problems that could sink the struggling Detroit Medical Center.

Closing Riverview violates its nonprofit status as a charity of the St. John Health System, which owns Riverview, according to Bruce Miller, attorney for Michigan AFSCME Local 25 and Riverview patients Inell Howard and the Rev. Lorraine Fuqua.

Closing the hospital also reverses promises the Warren-based St. John Health made to the Legislature and the Michigan Court of Appeals in 2003 and 2005 in return for getting permission to build a hospital in Novi, Miller said.

If Cox does not respond by June 4, the union, which represents 200 Riverview workers and the two Riverview patients, will sue, Miller said.

Cox could not be reached immediately for comment. St. John spokeswoman Deborah Reinheimer had no immediate comment.

Contact **PATRICIA ANSTETT** at 313-222-5021 or panstett@freepress.com.

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Article published May 29, 2007
Seniors cope with drug plan 'donut hole'

Elizabeth Huff
The Enquirer

Michigan seniors have been hit with the full cost of brand name drugs, thanks to new legislation.

Effective this year, the law eliminated Medicare's Part D prescription drug plans offering coverage during the gap period, dubbed the "donut hole."

People such as Janet Clapper, 72, of Battle Creek are finding out some of their brand-name drugs covered in 2006 are not covered this year. She said she reached the gap period around March or April and has had to dip into her savings for the about \$700 a month cost of her multiple prescriptions.

"I saved my money because I knew I'd need it when I got old, but now the government's taken it all," she said.

Seniors eligible for Medicare in 2006 selected from a list of competitive Part D plans offered by private insurance companies to cover the cost of prescriptions. The sign-up period generally is Nov. 15 to Dec. 31 for coverage without penalty beginning the following year.

But many seniors were shocked last year to discover coverage stopped when the total cost reached \$2,251. Most seniors taking expensive, brand-name drugs ended up paying thousands of dollars out-of-pocket for prescriptions mid-year.

The donut-hole coverage gap lasted until the total cost hit \$5,100; then emergency coverage kicked in, bringing the cost down to just a few dollars for each drug.

Some plans in 2006 offered coverage during the donut hole for a higher premium cost.

This year, that's not even an option.

"Regardless of anything, I would have had to pay full price for all them drugs," Clapper said. "That was the new law."

In Michigan, there are 1.5 million Medicare beneficiaries out of 43 million in the nation, according to a 2007 report by the Menlo Park, Calif.-based Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. Of the 54 plans offered to Michigan residents, 15 offer generic-only coverage during the gap period.

"Which is not helpful at all," said Jolene English, a Medicare/Medicaid assistance program counselor at Burnham Brook, 200 W. Michigan Ave.

"Thirteen states changed and unfortunately, Michigan was one of them."

But overall, more seniors are pleased with their Medicare Part D prescription drug plans now that the program is in its second year, she said.

Cliff Summerhill, 65, of Battle Creek last year thought he might have to stop taking his most expensive medications so his wife, Lillian, could afford hers. But he was surprisingly pleased with his coverage this year.

His physician switched him to all generic brands, which will keep him out of the donut hole as long as possible.

In addition, Summerhill got a letter last week saying he would be reimbursed for a glitch that took too much out of his Social Security check for medications. As far as he understands it, his prescription drug coverage should be free until the end of the year, he said.

"That damn program is confusing. There's nothing I understand about it, but 'free' I understand," he said, chuckling.

Some people qualify for low-income subsidy, also called "extra help," which covers almost all cost of brand name and generic drugs for singles with annual incomes of \$14,700 or less, or couples living together with incomes of \$19,800 or less this year.

"Those that are in the subsidy are totally happy, of course, because they have the full benefit there," English said.

But those who make just enough not to qualify for the low-income subsidy, such as Judy Speer, 65, of Battle Creek, have to pay much more.

She would have qualified if the money she receives from her and her deceased husband's retirement funds didn't count.

"I didn't know where else to go (for coverage)," she said. "You either pay for it, or you pay big hospital bills."

English, however, has seen a great reduction in the number of complaint calls this year. She said her office receives about one call per day, as opposed to what felt like hundreds per day last year.

"I think it's indicative that the plans are beginning to work," she said.

Still, English is encouraging seniors to write legislators about their concerns over Part D's lingering problems, such as the lack of gap coverage plans, expensive premiums and high cost of brand name drugs.

Calhoun County's low-income seniors who land in the donut hole also may apply for the Senior Millage Prescription Voucher Program. With a 24-hour turnaround time, seniors can get a one-time supplement of \$1,000 to pay for prescriptions. That's up from \$600 last year.

"It won't get me out of the donut hole, but it will help me get my prescriptions," said Clapper, who said she's thankful a friend told her about the voucher.

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Obama proposes expansive health care plan

Wealthy, most businesses would help cover high costs

May 29, 2007

By MIKE GLOVER

ASSOCIATED PRESS

IOWA CITY, Iowa — Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama on Tuesday offered a sweeping health care plan that would provide every citizen a means for coverage and calls on government, businesses and consumers to share the costs of the program.

Obama said his plan could save the average consumer \$2,500 a year and bring health care to all. Campaign aides estimated the cost of the program at \$50 billion to \$65 billion a year, financed largely by eliminating tax cuts for the wealthy that are scheduled to expire. President George W. Bush wants to make those cuts permanent.

"The time has come for universal, affordable health care in America," Obama said in a speech in Iowa City, at the University of Iowa's medical school.

While Obama's plan is aimed at expanding coverage, he said cutting costs was also essential.

"We have reached a point in this country where the rising costs of health care has put too many families and businesses on a collision course with financial ruin and left too many with no coverage at all," Obama said. "This cost crisis is trapping us in a vicious cycle."

Obama's plan retains the private insurance system but injects additional money to pay for expanding coverage. It would also create a National Health Insurance Exchange to monitor insurance companies in offering the coverage.

Those who can't afford coverage would get a subsidy on a sliding scale depending on their income, and virtually all businesses would have to share in the cost of coverage for their workers. The plan is similar to the one covering members of Congress.

Obama's package would prohibit insurance companies from refusing coverage because of preexisting conditions.

The plan doesn't have the mandate that rival Democratic candidate John Edwards is proposing to ensure that all Americans get coverage. The 2004 Democratic vice presidential nominee would require everyone to have health insurance, much like state requirements for auto insurance for every driver. Both candidates would require businesses to help cover their workers.

New York Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, who oversaw a massive but unsuccessful project to overhaul the nation's health care system while she was first lady, has promised universal health care but has yet to provide specifics.

"My plan begins by covering every American. If you already have health insurance, the only thing that will change for you under this plan is that the amount of money you will spend on premiums will be less," Obama said. "If you are one of 45 million Americans who don't have health insurance, you will after this plan becomes law."

Obama also called for a series of steps to overhaul the current health care system.

He would spend more money boosting technology in the health industry such as electronic record-keeping, put in place better management for chronic diseases and create a reinsurance pool for catastrophic illnesses to take the burden of their costs off of other premium payers.

His plan also envisions savings from ending the expensive care for the uninsured when they get sick. That care now is often provided at emergency rooms. The plan also would put a heavy focus on preventing disease through lifestyle changes.

Obama conceded that the overall cost of the program would be high.

"To help pay for this, we will ask all but the smallest businesses who don't make a meaningful contribution to the health coverage of their workers to do so to support this plan," said Obama. "And we also will repeal the temporary Bush tax cut for the wealthiest taxpayers."

Unveiling the proposal marks a crucial step for Obama. Serving in his first term as a senator, Obama often is criticized as not having the experience to be a serious candidate for the party's nomination.

Some also see him as offering more style than substance, and he's clearly hoping that spelling out a detailed plan to offer health care for all will deflect those criticisms. Polls also have shown that voters rank health care as among their top concerns.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Teen parent center needs the help United Way withdrew

Monday, May 28, 2007

BY KATE FOX

This letter is in response to the United Way allocations recently announced and in part as a follow-up to Susan L. Oppat's May 4 article in the Ann Arbor News, "Charities Reeling from Big United Way Cuts."

Like other staff members at HelpSource's Teen Parent Center in Ypsilanti, I'm puzzled by the United Way's decision to fund zero dollars of the \$80,000 requested in this year's grant process. The United Way determined that this year they would be funding programs that address the "basic needs - food, clothing, shelter, and health care" of individuals and families in Washtenaw County. The Teen Parent Center addresses all four basic needs as outlined by the Washtenaw United Way.

In the last year, the Teen Parent Center provided a well-balanced meal to 390 hungry mouths through the informal Drop-In Support group for pregnant and parenting teens that occurs every other Thursday evening from 5-7 p.m. Through the case management services of the Teen Parent Center, pregnant and parenting teens through the age of 21 were also assisted by staff in applying for and receiving food assistance through Department of Human Services, Women Infant & Children's (WIC) coupons, transportation to local food banks, and receipt of food items, which often included formula to feed babies and grocery bags of food donated by Meijer, given directly to the Teen Parent Center through generous donors,

The Teen Parent Center keeps a donation closet to receive maternity clothing and clothing for children from newborn through size 5 as pregnant and parenting teens served by the Teen Parent Center have children in that age range. Families served by the program are able to access the donated clothing when they identify a specific clothing need for themselves or their children.

While the Teen Parent Center does not physically provide shelter through a transitional living environment, the Teen Parent Center offers support and advocacy to pregnant and parenting teens in need of housing. In the last year, the Teen Parent Center provided vital support and advocacy assistance to ensure that 17 families secured and/or maintained their housing situation when they were homeless or facing eviction.

For the last year, the Teen Parent Center has found that 95-98 percent of the families served have obtained and/or maintained health insurance, primarily Medicaid varieties, since the overwhelming majority of families served by the Teen Parent Center are very low-income.

These families have been provided transportation assistance to ensure that they are engaged in prenatal and pediatric care, and specialized health care if needed. Staff members educate families on the importance of prenatal care; the dangers of alcohol, smoking, and other drugs during pregnancy; and the recommended schedule for well-child check-ups and immunizations.

Through a collaboration with the Lamaze Association of Ann Arbor, Washtenaw Area Council for Children, and Safe Kids Washtenaw County/Mott Buckle Up! Program, the Teen Parent Center is the only program in Washtenaw County that offers quarterly childbirth preparation classes to pregnant and parenting teens through the age of 21 and covering labor/delivery, breast-feeding, safer sleep, shaken baby syndrome, Dr. Harvey Karp's 5 S's for calming a crying baby, and car seat safety. The Teen Parent Center is proud to report that in the last year 100 percent of the babies born in the Teen Parent Center program weighed over 5.5 pounds; a birth weight below 5.5 pounds is considered low.

Not only is the Teen Parent Center Program the only program in Washtenaw County offering childbirth preparation classes to pregnant and parenting teens through the age of 21, but the Teen Parent Center is also the only program that provides a drop-in support group specifically for pregnant and parenting teens in the community.

The Teen Parent Center is also the only teen parent program with Project Outreach, a teen pregnancy prevention component that employs pregnant and parenting teens to design and implement presentations

in the middle schools and high schools throughout Washtenaw County in an effort to prevent further unintended pregnancy. Most recently, the Teen Parent Center is partnering with Washtenaw Literacy to offer an early reading group where pregnant and parenting teens are provided the opportunity to practice reading to their young children. Teen Parent Center services are designed to specifically address the unique barriers, needs, strengths and goals of each family served.

The Teen Parent Center shares the same philosophy with the Washtenaw United Way: that a family's basic needs must be met in order to ensure school success for children by age 6 and in order for their parents to become self-sufficient, contributing members of society through their time, their talents and their philanthropy.

The Teen Parent Center would like to thank all of its current and past funders that in the last year have included the Ann Arbor Community Development Block Grant, Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation's Youth Council, Children's Trust Fund, Community Foundation of Southeastern Michigan, Junior League of Ann Arbor, Kiwanis, James A. & Faith Knight Foundation, March of Dimes, Target, Washtenaw County Human Services, and prior to the recent allocation announcement, Washtenaw United Way.

More than a decade ago, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton was promoting her book "It Takes a Village." Society so easily accepts and applies this statement to women in the childbearing age range of 25 years of age and up, yet struggles and fails to accept and apply the principle of "it takes a village" when it's applied to pregnant and parenting teens. Pregnant and parenting teens are often left to fend for themselves in caring for their children whether they continue to reside at home, venture out on their own, or are kicked out of the house. Too often they are given the message, "You made this mistake - now you fix it on your own."

Unfortunately, we are at a point at the Teen Parent Center where we have to build a new village because the old one has been depleted. As program supervisor of the Teen Parent Center and as a strong believer in the work that I do, I am donating \$1,000 to help sustain the Teen Parent Center program.

I'm hoping that I can find 79 others to build a community of support with me by donating \$1,000 each in order to resurrect a village to help raise our more vulnerable members who appear to have lost out in the recent United Way allocations announcement.

To contribute essays to Other Voices, contact Mary Morgan, opinion editor, at 734-994-6605 or mmorgan@annarbornews.com.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

State should eliminate layer of bureaucracy in government departments

Sunday, May 27, 2007

By John Dillworth

This viewpoint is in response to Julie Mack's May 12 column on No Child Left Behind.

Julie notes that schools are one leg of the three-legged stool. I'm going to tweak her description of the other two legs -- it involves parents but it also involves community. That creates motivated students. It's all about expectations and fostering a positive learning environment, not just from kindergarten, but from birth.

Education is a key part of the circle of support for the child but it is just one part. Stable housing, employment for the parent(s), good child care, health care, mental health funding, transportation, literate parent(s), and a social network for the family that will step up when daily problems arise are all necessary for educational success. Each family has a set of puzzle pieces that need to snap together to create a stable environment for the child to allow educational success.

Goodwill Industries serves more than 1,700 families with more than 4,000 children who are or will be in the Kalamazoo Public School system through the Department of Human Services and Michigan Works. KPS has the kids. We have the at-risk parents of those children. Eight-five percent of those families are single mothers with children.

Solutions for every issue are currently available with the plethora of partnerships we have with KPS, DHS, Michigan Works, Michigan Rehabilitation Services, Housing Resources, Loaves and Fishes, and United Way agencies. The problem is one of capacity and the capacity issue exists because of funding OR more accurately, funding priorities.

As the head of DHS, Marianne Udow, adds two deputy directors and another layer of government in a budget crisis. Funding for Workers on Wheels (where we give cars to people who will lose their jobs without transportation) is being canceled with 10 days notice. Ninety percent of participants in this program are still employed after a year. This compares with the federally mandated program that has a success rate of 40 percent for 90 days.

The cost of Workers on Wheels is about \$3,500 per person. The state would pay this person's family \$5,500 per year if they weren't working. You can invest \$3,500 to save \$5,500 per year perhaps for the rest of the person's life or you can add a couple of deputy directors.

We have a partnership with Housing Resources and DHS called "Making It Work" that has similar success numbers. We have a Family Literacy Program with Michigan Works, Early On, and KPS that recently won an Annie E. Casey Award because of its success. The Boys and Girls Club is in the early stages of creating a teenage youth and employment program we hope to be an integral part of.

The bottom line is we know how to have a very strong three-legged stool in Kalamazoo. Can we bring political muscle to bear to make the necessary changes in funding priorities to help children from birth, instead of adding layers of state and federal government?

One of the most successful organizations in the world is right here in Kalamazoo and one of their keys to success is a flat structure -- very few layers even as they grow by double digits every year. I'm advocating that Gov. Jennifer Granholm, by executive order, or if necessary, through legislation, eliminate at least one layer of management throughout every department. Take the savings, put half into economic development, the other half into the social safety net for innovative human services programs that have proven results.

What about it, governor?

John Dillworth, of Kalamazoo, is the president and CEO of

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Tired of politics, constituents tell state rep.

BY MARIE HAVENGA

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SPRING LAKE — State Rep. Arlan Meekhof fielded many questions Thursday night during a town hall meeting at Spring Lake District Library — but it appeared his constituents had many more questions than the West Olive Republican had answers.



The theme from about 30 Tri-Cities residents in attendance Thursday rang clear — they're tired of politics and partisan-based issues. The voters want answers, and they want them now.

Meekhof spouted dismal numbers for Michigan's economy: the population has dipped by more than 1 million people in recent years; the state's economy is 600 percent more dependent on the automotive industry than any other state in the nation; and the state's Department of Corrections and jailing of inmates costs about \$30,000 per felon per year and drains more than 30 percent of the annual state budget.

Meekhof didn't paint the numbers pretty — he couldn't.

"There are opportunities for us to be more efficient with your money," the legislator said Thursday, adding that prisoners sentenced to a life term often receive education funded by taxpayers that equates to a doctorate level.

"Is that necessary?" Meekhof asked.

The questions from local residents centered on education and sustaining future generations to be productive citizens in today's society. Many people who spoke said they would be willing to pay more in taxes if the rewards for the common good of state residents equaled the cost.

"We have to know that we get nothing for nothing," said Grand Haven resident Caralee Nietering, adding that her grandmother once taught her that we have be willing to sacrifice for what is important long-term.

Spring Lake resident Roger White asked for bold change in Lansing.

"Partisan politics stink," he said. "How bad does it have to get in our state? I'm tired of this. I need an answer and I need an answer now. The people of Michigan recognize the problems. You are out of touch, just like the people in Washington (D.C.). You need to sit down and look at the problems that you should have addressed yesterday."

Meekhof said he's concerned Michigan residents haven't seen the worst of the state financial fallout.

"There are opportunities to fix Michigan, but I'm afraid we haven't hit the bottom yet," said Meekhof, who will be introducing a bill to charge toll fees for those visiting Indian gaming/gambling reservations. "I want to put toll roads in so everyone that goes in has to pay."

Meekhof took several opportunities to blame Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm for not signing into law Republican-sponsored bills. He stressed a need for more streamlined financial efficiency, including potential **changes in the welfare system**, income tax rate and teacher benefits.

Meekhof said Michigan is the only state in the nation that has unlimited welfare. It costs the state about \$83 million per year, much of which is doled out to "able-bodied" people, according to the state representative.

He called teacher retirement benefits a "hornet's nest," costing state taxpayers almost \$400 million per year.

Meekhof says fiscal responsibility is key.

"We overspent by more than \$200 million last year and we're not even done with the (fiscal) year yet," he said. "This overspending was known before the November election. We (officially) learned about it about two weeks after the election. But (Granholtz) has the bully pulpit. She can talk over everyone and she's allowed to do that."

Spring Lake resident Corinne Wieland suggested state officials should stop bickering over politics and start focusing on the real issues.

"We're invested in Michigan and we want to see it work," Wieland said. "We're not Democrat or Republican, we just love Michigan."

Meekhof said he will host a similar town meeting on June 21, also at Spring Lake District Library.

"Common sense doesn't always work in Lansing," he said. "It's amazing how smart people think they are when they're 15 miles around Lansing. There are a lot of smarter people out there."

"This was very, very informative tonight," the legislator said about Thursday's meeting. "People had a lot of passion when they spoke. That's why I like to do these public events. This is where I listen best."

Fate of DHS office in Rogers City still in limbo



News Photos by Amy Lisenbe

Janelle Santini, eligibility specialist at the Department of Human Services in Presque Isle County, works at her desk in Rogers City. Santini and other employees may be moved to another location if the Presque Isle office is closed. Santini said she is more concerned about the distance that would create for the office's clients.

By PHIL WENZEL

Employees of the Rogers City office of the Department of Human Services have been put on high alert. They may soon find themselves driving a lot farther to get to work.

In an effort to help solve its current budget problem, the State of Michigan has begun looking at ways to save money. Consolidating some state offices, including the Rogers City DHS, is on its list.

Edward Woods III, director of communication for the Office of Management and Budget, said consolidating would limit rent costs to the state. He said the state has been looking at different ideas since January but has yet to develop any concrete plans.

"We're looking at everything," Woods said. "As long as it's state-leased it doesn't matter."

A plan being considered would move the Rogers City DHS office (and its six full-time employees) into the same building as the Alpena office. The two would either share the building Alpena's offices are currently in or share another building. That would allow the state to pay only one rent bill.

But taking the DHS out of Rogers City would inconvenience more than just its employees. It also would have an effect on the office's clients. They would be forced to drive long distances for DHS services at a time when gas prices are well over \$3 per gallon. The office has several clients from the Onaway area who would have to drive even farther.

"We are critical and sensitive to ... insuring that Michigan citizens receive service," Woods said. "We're just making sure we're delivering it in the most cost sensitive way."

Doug McCombs, director of the DHS for Alpena and Presque Isle counties, said at this point the office is far from closed. He said negotiations between the owner of the office building in Rogers City and the state are ongoing. But he added "I don't know how much dialogue has occurred."

Presque Isle County Board of Commissioners Chairman Allan Bruder said he has spoken to State Sen. Jason Allen, R-Traverse City, about saving the office. He said it isn't normally a commissioner's job, but the office is important to the county and he does not want to see it closed.

"The commissioners are in total support of keeping this thing in Presque Isle County," Bruder said,

adding they will be "very vocal" on the matter.

Bruder said he has been told the DHS will maintain some type of presence in Presque Isle County.

McCombs said some of the other options being looked at include finding a building in Presque Isle County with lower rent and having different state agencies share the same building. However, he said the latter may not offer a great deal of savings in the long run and so it may not be a viable possibility.

But McCombs said DHS has gotten several offers within the Rogers City area to relocate its offices. He said if DHS can find an office in Presque Isle County that could hold the entire staff and cost them little in rent his superiors in Lansing would support it.

There has been some discussion about moving the offices to Onaway if cheaper rent could be found there.

"There are pros and cons to just about any location," McCombs said. "If we move, we're pulling business out of Rogers City, but we have more customers in Onaway."

Consolidating DHS offices is not a new idea. McCombs said it has been done with the Leelanau County and Grand Traverse County branches, as well as those in Charlevoix and Emmet counties.

"The state has seen it can work and that has gotten them looking at other situations," McCombs said.

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'07 Budget Agreement Reached

MIRS, May 25, 2007

The House and Senate agreed on a plan today that balances the \$803 million hole in Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 budget without cutting K-12 education funding or cutting Medicaid provider rates by, for the most part, securitizing more tobacco settlement revenue unless another revenue source is found.

The two chambers overwhelmingly approved a piece of the agreement today, a \$307.6 million budget-balancing bill that prevents the temporary layoffs of 29 State Police troopers, doesn't touch revenue sharing to local units of government, but does use \$30 million in unused 21st Century Jobs Fund money.

Resolutions were introduced expressing the Legislature's intent to securitize \$400 million more in tobacco settlement money and somehow use roughly \$100 million from the Higher Education Loan Authority to make up the rest of the hole. The agreement will take several pieces of legislation to become official.

Senate Majority Leader Mike **BISHOP** (R-Rochester) also pointed out that the deal that was made tonight was essentially the same deal that was agreed to last week.

"The interesting part is that this is basically the same deal we had a long time ago," he said. "I'm disappointed that it took this long to finish."

Today's deal would appear to be a victory for Bishop, in that the Senate Republican had vowed that the FY 2007 budget be balanced without a tax increase and the FY 2008 budget be solved separate of '07. However, it appears today's deal came with an agreement from Bishop that a tax increase is necessary to solve the '08 budget (See related story).

Dillon hinted around the situation this evening when asked about the perception that Bishop walked out of today's session as a clear winner.

"I'm comfortable with where we're at. There's a reason we moved today," he said. When asked about the future of a tax hike vote, Dillon said, "That will happen when it has to happen."

Today's action happened after a rare Friday session in which Bishop, Dillon and Lt. Gov. John **CHERRY** met throughout the morning and afternoon in Bishop's Capitol office. The deal spared the chambers from having to meet Saturday, which the House and Senate were prepared to do.

Granholm Press Secretary Liz **BOYD** told *MIRS* that this week's negotiations bore fruit for the administrations' top priorities.

"The Governor, the Speaker and the Senate Majority Leader made good progress in their budget talks and they found a way to protect our priorities — education and health care," Boyd said. "Talks are still ongoing and there's still a lot of work to be done. We believe we will be able to resolve the 2007 and 2008 budgets in a way that will continue to protect education and healthcare. All of the progress should be seen as a victory for education."

It also spares the state from having to take emergency actions to balance the FY '07 budget. Had they not taken action before next Friday to balance the budget, Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** was prepared to cut schools by \$122 per pupil and cut Medicaid provider rates by 6 percent. State employee layoffs and emergency loans from various state funds also were in the cards.

But today's plan makes nearly all of the cuts both sides previously agreed to in **SB 0220** earlier this month. Highlights are as followed.

- Universities would see a \$25.88 million cut on top of the \$69.3 million in '07 money it would not receive until early '08. Community colleges wouldn't see \$12.88 million of its '07 money until '08. The cuts equal to 59.8 percent of whatever funding increase the universities received in FY 2007 as opposed to FY 2006. Universities that received higher increases in '07 took bigger cuts in the bill.
- Arts and Cultural Grants would be cut 38 percent to \$3.6 million
- The Healthy Michigan Fund would be sliced \$3.164 million, meaning 21 public health programs would be cut by 25 percent or less. Among the programs impacted would be minority health, immunization, Alzheimer's disease, cancer, smoking prevention, Parkinson's disease, diabetes/kidney, family planning, maternal and child health, childhood lead and senior nutrition services.
- Four percent cuts are slated for the Legislature (\$6.534 million), judiciary (\$4.1 million) and the governor's office (\$194,000)
- The Department of Natural Resources would be cut \$510,000, the Secretary of State \$757,900 and the Attorney General \$308,000

The Chambers agreed to raid seven various separate pots of state money for another \$167.9 million. The fund includes \$35 million from the county's Convention Facilities Fund, \$30 million from the 21st Century Jobs Fund, \$5.27 million from the Comprehensive Transportation Fund (a Soo Locks Set Aside), \$70 million from the Refined Petroleum Fund, \$20 million from the Michigan Conservation Corps Endowment Fund, \$7.2 million from the State Campaign Fund and \$450,000 from the other funds managed under the Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

The House passed the new bill, **SB 0436**, 69-37, with little debate. Moments later, the Senate passed it 26-10 with 10 Dems voting no. The Dems who voted against the bill

include: Senate Minority Leader Mark **SCHAUER** (D-Battle Creek), Sen. Gretchen **WHITMER** (D-East Lansing), Sen. Mike **PRUSI** (D-Ishpeming), Sen. Tupac **HUNTER** (D-Detroit), Sen. Hansen **CLARKE** (D-Detroit), Sen. Irma **CLARK-COLEMAN** (D-Detroit), Sen. Liz **BRATER** (D-Ann Arbor), Sen. Ray **BASHAM** (D-Taylor), Sen. Jim **BARCIA** (D-Bay City) and Sen. Martha G. **SCOTT** (D-Highland Park).

Schauer said he voted against the bill because he's personally opposed to some of the cuts in the bill including cuts to higher education and the Healthy Michigan Fund.

"Personally, I would have preferred a solution that balanced with revenue to avoid these cuts," Schauer said.

Dillon made it clear today that \$400 million in securitized tobacco money is a safety net in case another solution isn't found, but the House Speaker made it clear that he realized Wall Street will not look favorably on the move and he will try to find another solution. The House showed it was serious about this course of action by passing a resolution (**HR 0123**) stating its intent.

A separate resolution, **HR 0124**, stated the Legislature's intention to tap into roughly \$100 million of unrestricted Higher Education Loan Authority money to prevent cuts to education and public health.

In other action in the House today, the chamber passed, 58-41, **HB 4799**, that prevents retired school employees from continuing to receive their pension if they come back to work at the school and begin collecting a pay check. The "anti-double dipping" bill was tie-barred to the income tax increase.

Also passed unanimously (105-0) was **HB 4246**, sponsored by Rep. Glenn **STEIL** Jr. (R-Grand Rapids), which makes it clear that when two or more local units of government combined services, the labor agreements made under the previous arrangements stay in effect. The common perception among governments is that when two services are combined, the local units need to honor the more generous contract of the two for all of the employees.

Steil argued this would encourage more municipalities to combine services.

HB 4266, sponsored by Rep. Paul **OPSOMMER** (R-DeWitt), also encourages locals to consolidate by addressing issues involving local wage scales. That bill also passed unanimously.